



Retread carefully

The rising cost of new tyres – inflated due to the cost of raw materials – is leading many operators to consider retreads. And, as Steve Banner discovers, the market is offering both quality and a wide selection

Skyrocketing prices and a shortage of tyres are bedevilling truck, bus and coach operators, with little chance of any immediate respite. “We put our prices up by 12% in 2010 and we’ve had to increase them by 13% so far this year,” concedes Arthur Gregg, sales and marketing director, commercial tyres, at Continental – and he doesn’t rule out further rises, even before the end of this year.

Continental is by no means unique, with Goodyear Dunlop, as well as Bridgestone, reporting

similar increases. “We announced two 5% rises in 2010 and we’ve introduced a further 14.5% increase to date this year,” says Bridgestone’s UK marketing manager for commercial tyres, Roger Moulding. The reason for the Japanese manufacturer’s price increase? Escalating raw material costs, with steel, oil and natural rubber all culprits.

As for tyre shortages, they are occurring because factories that wound down production during the recession are struggling to crank it back up again, now that orders have started to increase.

“While UK OE and retrofit demand may be down by between 4% and 5%, across the whole of Europe it’s up 16%,” Gregg contends.

The lack of product has been exacerbated, he adds, by the decision among some low-cost Far Eastern manufacturers to reduce supplies to the UK and sell what they have in other markets, with an eye to boosting profit margins. “I suspect, however, that some of them may be planning a return to the British market,” suggests Gregg.

That said, he doubts that the tyres drought will diminish any time soon. So, with new tyres expensive and in short supply, some operators are considering the merits of retreads even more closely. And at around 60% of the price of equivalent new tyres, as

well as the environmental kudos arising from their recycling of existing tyres' casings, many may be liking what they see.

Retreads: the right choice?

Re-treading processes do, however, involve the use of additional raw materials, so producers here, too, are affected by price rises. Furthermore, because new truck production shrank during the recession, the number of tyres supplied at the OE level shrank, too. "So there are constraints on tyre casing availability," states Adam Stanton, UK product marketing manager, commercial tyres, at Goodyear Dunlop.

These barriers are not, however, preventing re-treaders from expanding their activities, possibly with an eye to future growth, as the availability of casings gradually improves and demand steadily rises.

For example, a few short months ago, Goodyear Dunlop opened a £3m-plus hot-cure retread plant in Wittlich, Germany, which was initially scheduled to turn out 100,000 retreads this year. The new factory joins the company's existing hot-cure factories in Riom, France and in Wolverhampton, neither of which is threatened by the new operation. In fact, a further £1m will also be invested in the German retread factory later this year, increasing its capacity to 150,000 retreads a year.

"We want to make retreads available to a wider group of customers and Wittlich is at the heart of the main European market for truck tyres," states Henry Johnson, Goodyear Dunlop's vice president, commercial tyres for Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

New tread

As well as investing more money in production facilities, Goodyear Dunlop has been busy extending its mould-cure range, establishing TreadMax and MultiTread alongside its existing Next Tread line-up.

TreadMax solely uses carcasses from Goodyear Max Technology products, such as the Regional RHD II and RHS II drive and steer tyres, while MultiTread only employs carcasses from the latest generation of Dunlop tyres, such as the SP 372 and

SP 472, designed for municipal vehicles. Both TreadMax and MultiTread offer the same, or similar, performance characteristics to the new tyres from which they are derived, says the manufacturer.

To underline this point, as far as fuel usage is concerned, Goodyear Dunlop conducted a six-month trial in co-operation with Austrian operator Zeller Transporte. New Goodyear LHD II tyres were fitted to the drive-axle of a MAN TGA 18.440 4x2 tractor unit, hooked up to a triaxle trailer on long-haul work. They covered 107,412km, during which time the truck returned 32 litres/100km.

Those tyres were then removed, TreadMax LHD II retreads were fitted instead and the vehicle covered a further 64,460km, this time returning 32.5 litres/100km – making them only marginally less frugal.

Goodyear has also developed a 385/65 R22.5 tyre in conjunction with Schmitz Cargobull. Intended for a new lightweight semi-trailer, it allows 20 tonnes on a tandem bogie with single tyres, because it has a load index of 164 (5 tonnes), instead of the usual 160 (4.5 tonnes). This tyre has a four-rib design and the prototype has '10t' incorporated in the tread, plus coloured sidewall markings to highlight the axle capacity permitted by the tyre.

Elsewhere, Continental is expanding its ContiRe hot-cure retread offer in the UK from four to 30 sizes, according to Gregg, and intends to secure supplies of suitable Continental casings by putting a lot more effort into obtaining them.

"As things stand, quite a few of them are ending up in the hands of the retread operations of other tyre manufacturers and with independent re-treaders," he says.

Meanwhile, Michelin has recently introduced the X MultiWay 3D truck tyre for both steer- and drive-axle applications. Aimed at so-called regional hauliers – those whose vehicles typically spend 60% of their time on local roads,

The price is right

High prices mean that there is an appetite for budget-priced tyres, but prudent operators will want to be sure they come from a reputable source. Part of the Goodyear Dunlop group, Sava says it can offer them that assurance.

Based in Slovenia, it has just introduced a new range of truck tyres, with 22.5, 19.5 and 17.5in sizes all set to figure in the line-up. They are aimed at cost-conscious operators on regional and local runs, and should appeal to companies that tackle stop/start work, says Goodyear Dunlop's Adam Stanton. "I'm thinking of businesses engaged in parcel delivery and inner-city distribution," he explains.

While Goodyear-branded tyres are likely to wear better, the new Sava tyres can claim an improvement in both mileage and rolling resistance when judged against their predecessors, contends Stanton. "They come with a quality, durable carcass," states Stanton. "And Goodyear Dunlop would be happy to retread it."





and 40% on dual carriageways and motorways – it is said to offer up to 30% better mileage in drive-axle guise and up to 15% on steer-axes, compared with Michelin's XDE2+ and XZE2+ respectively. Rolling resistance has fallen, too, by as much as 25% against what is on offer from some of the newcomers' stablemates, according to the manufacturer.

Not to be outdone, Continental has come up with the HD Hybrid, a dual-purpose drive-axle tyre designed to appeal to customers whose trucks may be on regional work one day and distance work the

next. It has also introduced the 17.5in LSR1+ and LDR1+ for steer and drive use respectively, promising an up to 10% cut in rolling resistance. That equates to lower fuel consumption – with Continental claiming that LSR1+ and LDR1+ can bring about fuel savings of between 3% and 4%.

No-one doubts the importance of all of these benefits for operators, given the painfully high price of diesel. Indeed, it is this specific requirement that prompted Bridgestone to launch its low rolling resistance Ecopia line-up for truck and coach applications, according to the company's Moulding. And they work: for long-distance runs involving many miles of motorway travel, a set of steer-pattern R249 Ecopias fitted all round to a coach will deliver a 14% cut in rolling resistance, leading to a 3.0–3.5% reduction in fuel usage, he suggests.

But the ability to cut rolling resistance is not the sole preserve of companies that make new tyres: retreaders Bandvulc and Vacu-Lug are among those claiming achievements of their own. The former says that its Dynamic range of retreads was subjected to testing at Millbrook last year and recorded a 10.4% cut in rolling resistance, compared with the performance of a standard truck tyre.

Meanwhile, the latter has teamed up with HE Payne Transport and potato merchant Greenvale AP, one of Payne's customers, to trial a new generation of Duramold retreads, using a silica-based compound said to reduce rolling resistance by as much as 30%. For the purposes of the trial, they were coloured green to hammer home their environmental credentials. **TE**

Operator experiences

Blue Dragon Transport is hoping that an increased emphasis on tyre maintenance will help it cut costs. It has enlisted ATS Euromaster to supply and service the tyres on its 20 trucks and 28 trailers.

As well as ensuring that the operator sticks to a clearly defined brand policy – Hankook and Taurus in this case – ATS is inspecting its tyres fortnightly and checking pressures monthly, as well as handling breakdowns, all under contract.

ATS has also won back pan-European operator John Bywater Transport, which returned to Michelin's. The Pall-Ex member runs 45 tractor units and 35 trailers from two depots. As well as fitting tyres and checking pressures, ATS handles turning on the rim, twinning and wheel alignment. It re-grooves the tyres, too, which are then remoulded in line with Michelin's Four Lives policy.

ATS Euromaster's recently launched software FleetMax is said to benefit operators when used in conjunction with its electronic tyre inspection tool. The condition of each tyre on a vehicle can be examined in detail and reports then used to reduce operating costs.

All tyre and wheel damage is logged; charts showing remaining tread depth by axle and in millimetres can be displayed; and each report includes what ATS describes as a dashboard summary. A facsimile of a vehicle's instrument panel, it provides an overview of the situation, together with warnings of problems.

